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ABSTRACT

The new secondary education curriculum in Malaysia, which uses an approach integrating skill development, content knowledge, and values, is examined from the perspective of language teaching and learning. Specific attention is given to the ways that curriculum and materials design can contribute to overall student development, the primary objective of the new integrated curriculum. Various questions with regard to design principles are addressed, such as: (1) In what way does the language program contribute to the development of the individual as a member of society? (2) What kinds of language skills and experiences are needed to achieve overall integrated development? and (3) What assumptions about language and language learning would best support classroom strategies and materials production, be in line with national goals, and contribute to target language mastery? The detailed guidelines for basic and supplemental materials development, drawn up according to language curriculum guidelines, and the resulting materials are briefly described. The strategy of providing 360 resource centers for additional instructional support is also explained. An analysis of the problems and other issues relating to the new curriculum looks at: shortcomings found in the newly developed materials; meaningful integration of content, skills, and values; the place of literature in the curriculum; and production of support materials. A brief bibliography is included. (MSE)

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MATERIALS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING: NEW TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS - THE MALAYSIAN SCENE

Asiah Abu Samah

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FOCUS ON INTEGRATION

The central concern of education in Malaysia, like in most other countries of the Region, is the total development of the individual. To this end the national philosophy of education lays special emphasis on the harmonious and integrated development of intellectual, spiritual, moral, social, emotional and physical attributes of the individual in the context of a united, balanced and progressive Malaysian Society. Our curriculum renewal efforts in the last five to ten years have been committed towards realising these noble objectives. In fact, so concerned were we with the goal of "harmonious integration" that we decided to focus our recent review of the primary and secondary school curricula on this theme.

The review of our primary and secondary curricula offered wonderful opportunities for innovation in the realm of teaching-learning strategies and materials development. The New Primary School Curriculum (KBSR), which was implemented in stages from 1983, placed special emphasis on development in the basic literacy and numeracy skills as well as overall development of the child. With the child-centred approach in mind, various pedagogical techniques such as group work, peer coaching, remedial instruction, and integration of various kinds of skills with knowledge content and value orientations, were tried out and implemented. These new emphases gave rise to all kinds of new developments and directions in the area of materials development. For example the new subject area popularly known as Man and the Environment saw not only attempts at interdisciplinary integration of content between the natural and social sciences but also the employment of a repertoire and pedagogical devices and materials production strategies that were derived from isolated experiments that had been hitherto undertaken.

It is not the objective of this paper to deal in detail with the innovative attempts of KBSR in the area of pedagogy and materials development. Nevertheless a reference to these attempts is necessary at this stage in order to set the scene for certain developments that are taking place in terms of materials

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production and materials utilisation strategies that shall be dealt with later in the paper.

The primary concern of this paper is to examine the main focus of the new integrated secondary curriculum (KBSM) which is more singularly devoted to the expansion of the integration concept and strategy. The KBSM, coming after the KBSR, benefitted a great deal from the KBSR experience - both in terms of strengths and weaknesses. If in KBSR we saw the beginnings of an attempt at integration in certain areas of learning and pedagogical techniques, in KBSM we are making a bolder attempt at intergration by making it the central concern.

CURRICULUM DESIGN ISSUES

The integration strategy has had far reaching implications in the design and organisation of the language programmes. Various questions with regard to design principles were addressed to, such as:

(i) In what way is the language programme contributing to the overall development of the student so that he can take his place as a knowledgeable and responsible member of Malaysian society, capable of contributing to his own well-being as well as that of the community around him?

(ii) What kinds of language skills and experiences are needed in order to achieve this overall integrated development goal?

(iii) What assumptions about language and language learning would best influence and chart classroom strategies and materials production that are in line with national goals as well contribute towards effective mastery of the target language?

In applying ourselves to the above questions, we realised that the mechanistic behaviourist theory treats language learning as mastery of a string of rules through, for example, sentence based drills, has only limited application in terms of overall individual development, or for that matter, in terms of effective mastery of the language. It was increasingly realised that, while appreciating the partial usefulness of the behaviourist approach, we need a more satisfactory theory of language and language learning that would more comprehensively take into account national goals as well as effectiveness in learning. The behaviourist theory seems to place too much emphasis on the learner as a mere passive receiver of information. On the other hand, the cognitive view, with its assumption that language learning is a rule-discovery activity, emphasizes the role of the

learner as a more active processor of information, and as such it seems to be a more favourable strategy.

We also took into consideration the view that language is best learnt when it is used for purposes of communication. There needs to be a balance between "accuracy" and "fluency". This view of language learning brings with it a social and emotional dimension that seems very appropriate for the purpose of dynamic communication in the language.

Also, in the interest of integrated overall devlopment, we feel our language syllabuses should not be value-free. We would like to see our language programmes inculcate in the student a sense of pride and worth in being Malaysian. We want to reinforce in him the awareness that a balanced individual is guided by certain universal values as well as by specific cultural and social norms.

The burning question is, HOW CAN OUR MATERIALS REFLECT THESE CONCERNS?

MATERIALS DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

It is a universally accepted fact that a language programme is as good as the teaching-learning strategy adopted to convey this programme. Central to this teaching-learning strategy are the pedagogical techniques and the materials designed to affect the strategy.

The aims, objectives and content of the langauge programmes are laid out in the teaching syllabuses which outline the basic items to be taught in terms of skills, values, vocabulary, grammar and other relevant items. The task of the materials designer is to translate these syllabus objectives and content into operational, performance terms, i.e. into practical instructional plans. Integral to this exercise is the production of curriculum guidelines which involves elaboration and sequencing of the given syllabus items. Based on these curriculum guidelines, very detailed materials development guides were drawn up to assist textbook and other kinds of materials production. It is believed that since the majority of teachers and students are going to depend on textbooks as their main resource for teaching and learning, efforts should not be spared towards ensuring the quality of their production (Hutchinson and Waters rightly refer to the textbbok and such materials as "The Materials Syllabus").

The guidelines for textbook writing covered a wide range of issues. The attention of textbook writers was not only drawn to the aims, objectives and basic content of the language curriculum as presented in the syllabus, but also to pedagogical principles like the integration of skills, content and values; level of proficiency of the students; control in the use of language; balance of treatment of the different skills; the relevancy and suitability of situations and activities; and

the presentation and organisation of the texts, activities and illustrations in terms of skills to be taught and exercises for practice, consolidation, reinforcement and revision.

Bearing in mind the individual differences in the learning ability of the learners, the attention of textbook writers was consistently drawn to the need to produce multi-graded and multi-media materials to cater to these differing needs. With this in view, two new features were introduced as accompaniment to the student's text, viz. the teacher's handbook and, in the case of English, an audio-tape containing various kinds of exercises pertaining to English sounds that pose difficulty to Malaysian children.

The resultant textbook manuscripts, produced on a competitive basis, were stringently scrutinised by evaluation panels set up by the Ministry of Education's Textbook Bureau. These evaluation panels made detailed analyses of each book and subsequently submitted their reports to a high-level final selection committee chaired by no less than the Director-General of Education himself. The textbook titles finally approved by this committee were transmitted, together with sample copies from the publishers, to selection panels at the state or school level. These local-level panels made the ultimate decision as to which book or books is/are most suitable for use in their schools.

While it is accepted that the textbook is the main resource for teaching-learning, the need for multi-media support materials is also recognised. This need had been felt during the implementation of KBSR: The Educational Technology Division working closely with the Curriculum Development Centre, had produced multi-media support materials for the different subject areas. The visual materials were telecast through the Educational Television (ETV) service; the audio materials through the Schools Radio broadcasts; and the printed materials that were done for Mathematics and the Language were disseminated to schools through the State Education Departments. Besides the direct telecast/broadcast of the visual/audio materials, these materials were also canned on video and audio tapes and despatched to local resource centres and schools for use as supplementary materials.

The main thrust of suppport materials development however should be at the local and school levels. Efforts towards this have been emphasised and developed with the implementation of KBSR where, through the network of state, district and school resource centres, teachers have been encouraged to come together to pool their expertise and resources to produce much-needed support materials required to supplement the centrally produced materials required to supplement the centrally produced materials like curriculum specifications and textbooks. To augment these efforts the Schools Division of the Ministry had since 1981 embarked on a pilot project in 25 primary schools with the aim of encouraging wider use of school libraries and resource centres. In fact it was this project that saw the widening concept of school libraries, particularly the

conversion of school libraries into resource centres. The canned video and audio programmes, and printed materials that had been undertaken by the Educational Technology Service became the ready inputs to these resource centres. As most Malaysian primary schools had been provided with television sets and video and audio programmes became very convenient indeed.

With the early success of these 25 pilot schools, other school libraries began to follow suit in converting to resource centres. To supplement the collection of materials at the resource centres. To supplement the collection of materials at the resource centres, as well as to ensure the relevancy of materials, teachers were encouraged and assisted to develop support materials they require for their daily teaching and to store these at the resource centres for future retrieval. Based on these efforts we hope to encourage the setting up of materials banks at these centres, as well as at the district level where teachers could be further encouraged to contribute to and benefit from these banks.

As a necessary supportive infrastructure for such laudable efforts at school and district level, the Ministry of Education has embarked on a nationwide strategy towards setting up resource centres at state, district and school levels. To date four model state resource centres have been established in the states of Kelantan, Trengganu, Pahang and Kedah. The current district and school resource centres are being upgraded with more up-to-date mateials and equipment. Under the current Eighth World Bank Loan Scheme, 360 new district resource centres are being built and equipped.

These state and district resource centres will operate in the context of the following functions:

(i) to act as a catalyst towards overall professional development of teachers, particularly professionalism in pedagogy.

(ii) to provide in-service training and guidance to teachers in materials production techniques.

(iii) to act as a materials bank to which teachers can contribute what they have developed either at the school level or at the resource centre itself, and from where they can obtain model materials for reproduction and production equipment like cameras, video or audio recording facilities, etc. for self-production of materials for use at the school level.

(iv) to assist teachers, through in-service courses and informal meetings, in acquiring skills of organising and managing their book and non-book materials more systematically at the school level, for easy retrieval.

(v) to help heighten current awareness of teachers through newsletters and other extension services by keeping them up-to-date on the state of the art in materials production, organisation and use.

(vi) to offer on the spot professional advice to teachers in the course of visits to school resource centres.

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With these developments, the Ministry hopes the process of decentralization in materials development that had been started with the KBSR will continue to grow and prosper under the KBSM. The idea of school resource centres had already caught on in secondary schools and we are confident KBSM materials production needs will provide the impetus for further efforts in multi-media resource materials development in secondary schools.

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

All these noble attempts at systemizing production and improving the quality and utilization of textbooks and support materials are not without attendant issues and problems of course. Ever conscious of these issues, the Ministry's research and evaluation arms at the various divisions like the Curriculum Development Centre, the Inspectorate of Schools and the Educational Technology Division working cooperatively with the State Education Departments have been doing continuous monitoring and evaluation of the effects of such efforts. From the feedback obtained it is obvious that there is still ample room for improvement.

The first batch of language textbooks produced for the KBSM that are already in use in Form I (Grade 7) in the schools this year, while showing a marked improvement compared to pre-KBSM books, still manifest several forms of shortcomings. Textbook writers still have a tendency to pitch their materials at the average student, with the result that the high flyers and the low achievers are not adequately catered for. Our hopes was to see books catering to various levels of ability, so that schools could select the level or levels relevant to the needs of their students. There were courageous attempts in some books to introduce the multi-level concept in the earlier chapters but these were not sufficiently built up in the ensuring chapters. This has been a consistent problem with our language textbooks, and there is need for further in-depth research into the cause of such problems. Also we feel ther needs to be more open dialogue between curriculum developers, textbook writers/publishers and textbook consumers. Perhaps future briefings for textbook writers/publishers could be conducted in the form of workshops where problems could be more openly discussed. There seems to be a persistent problem about open discussions between curriculum planners and textbook writers. Textbook writers are not too inclined to ask questions or offer comments or suggestions at such briefing sessions. They apparently feel that if they seek and obtain too much information, they are losing out to their other competitors at the briefing sessions - which is not a very healthy situation, no doubt; but then textbook production is such a competitive business these days.

Besides this difficulty in meeting the multi-level need, the issue of meaningful integration of linguistic items with knowledge content and values also presents a problem. In some of the books the infusion of values is done in such a direct and glaring manner that it produces a very unnatural effect. Some only pay lip service to integration. Many of the Bahasa Malaysia books are still to preoccupied with the different forms of grammar and grammatical analysis that the more functional, humanistic and aesthetic aspects of the language are lost.

There is no doubt that infusion of values in a natural and effective manner into language learning texts and exercises without jeopardising the functional and communicative aspects of the language is a monumental task to the textbook writer. In this area perhaps the curriculum developer together with the teacher trainer needs to do more actual experimentation in the laboratory situation in schools in order to produce more meaningful samples and guidelines for not just the textbook writers but more so for the teachers who ultimately have to effect the integration in their schools. Integration requires very careful and deliberate selection and synthesis of content and employment of suitable pedagogical techniques for it to achieve some measure of success.

Our colleagues at the Curriculum Development Centre are now busy applying themselves to this task. With the added experience and insight gained in this exercise, as well as hindsight and feedback from the implementation of the current set of textbooks in the schools, future efforts should prove more fruitful.

Another issue that is inherently related to the issue of integration is the question of the literary, humanistic and aesthetic worth of the texts and oher stimuli used in the textbooks; in short, the place of literature in this whole exercise. There has been some attempt at integrating literature in the Bahasa Malaysia programme, even though it is treated in very functional terms in the syllabus. This perhaps explains why it does not emerge as a significant component in the textbooks. As far as the English programme is concerned, this aspect has not been given too much prominence at the syllabus design or textbook guideline stage, partly perhaps due to the fact that we were too engrossed with the more functional aspects of language instruction and integration at the time. But this has now emerged as an issue. For, upon reflection on the history of our own education, was it not the study of literature and our other literary pursuits that helped shape our character and our attitudes and perceptions of life and living in general? How much of these elements are still preserved in our educational and, in particular, our language programmes? Is it not the study of the great literary works of the past and the present that help provide a focus as well as a humanistic "home" to our more mechanistic and functional study of language? The question in our minds now is: Was this omission a weakness in our curriculum design or in our materials design? Or is the element of literary study too early to be introduced at the lower secondary level? (At the upper secondary level it is being planned as a separate elective course). If it is desirable at the lower

secondary level, is it to be introduced as a significant separate component or should it be integrated into areas like Reading and Writing? What pedagogical and materials development strategies could be considered to foster its effective teaching and learning? Perhaps this seminar could help give some answers to these questions.

Turning now to the area of support materials production, we find that this aspect too is riddled with issues. From our experience in the implementation of KBSR, some interesting lessons could be drawn. Firstly we found that, except for textbooks, support materials produced centrally (e.g. at the level of the Ministry of Education) were less favourable to teachers than those produced by teachers themselves at the local or school level. We are still in the process of ascertaining the reason for this, but it is our belief now that materials produced centrally tend to be too remote from their local and specific needs to be of much immediate use to practising teachers. The materials teachers produce themselves are the result of their own need analysis and are geared to their peculiar circumstances. Also there is that personal sense of ownership and pride with regard to materials that they have produced with their own efforts.

Secondly, there is the issue of teachers not being acquainted with the fact that there are materials that have been produced to deal with the kinds of pedagogical problems they are facing. Specific materials to deal with specific problems like these need to be brought to the attention of teachers and to be properly demonstrated to them through workshop sessions arrnaged by the Education Department or the schools, we meet teachers who are struggling to help their slower pupils in Mathematics or Reading or whatever the case may be, who obviously need help and yet do not seem to know where to obtain help from. Yet we do know there have been materials produced to deal with these problems that we witness and these materials are supposed to have reached all schools. A recent report by the Inspectorate of Schools touches on the very same issue: While we are informed that there are schools which are using such materials to help overcome some of their difficulties, we also hear of materials still bundled up in the headmaster's office or in the school store-room!

Thirdly, there is the vexing issue of the strategy of managing the entire exercise of materials production, dissemination, utilisation, storage and retrieval. Who is to inititate the materials development exercise, and how are prospective materials developers to be identified? When is the exercise to be undertaken: during school hours or outside formal school time. What resources like equipment, raw materials, funds are available to the teachers? What kind of guidance or training is required by teachers to produce the materials they need?

When the materials are ready, there is the question of what is the best way of duplicating them. Consequent to that there is the need to plan for their dissemination and demonstration in terms of utilisation to other teachers. Too often we tend to take effective utilisation of materials too much for granted; as though

getting the materials safely to schools is fool-proof guarantee that they will be used effectively. Remember the case of the materials still bundled up in the headmaster's room? Even if the materials get to the teachers' hands, there is still no guarantee the teachers will be able to utilise them properly if there is no guidance as to their use.

These are some of the issues that the planners and managers in our education system have to handle and strategise for solutions in the coming years. A start has been made towards devolution of materials production to the local and school levels. We need to build on these efforts so that the seeds that have been sown shall bear fruit in producing more effective materials development and utilisation techniques in our schools.

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